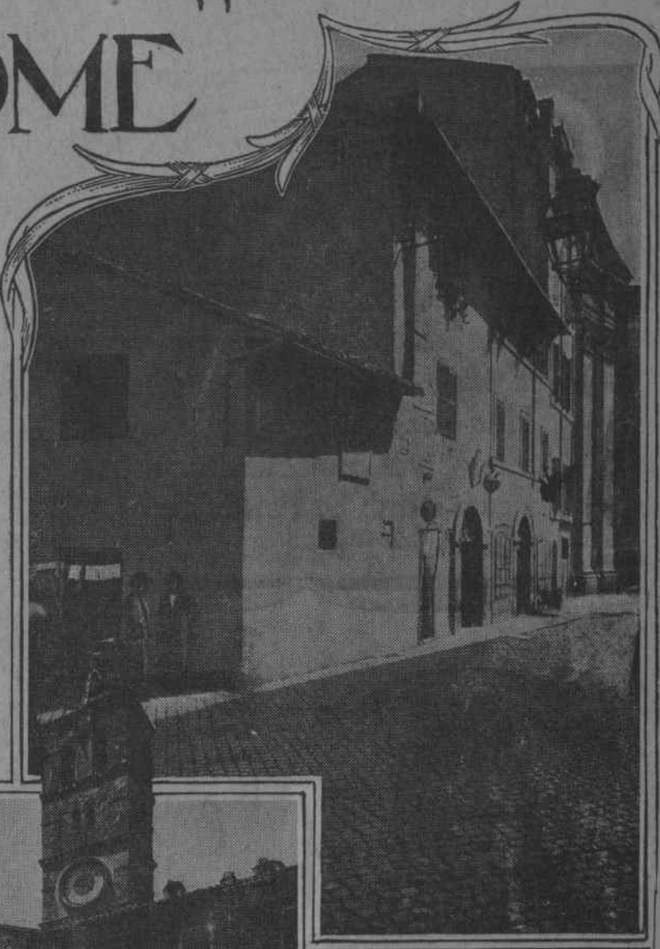
TRASTEVERE—WHERE DWELLS "THE QUEEN of ROME"

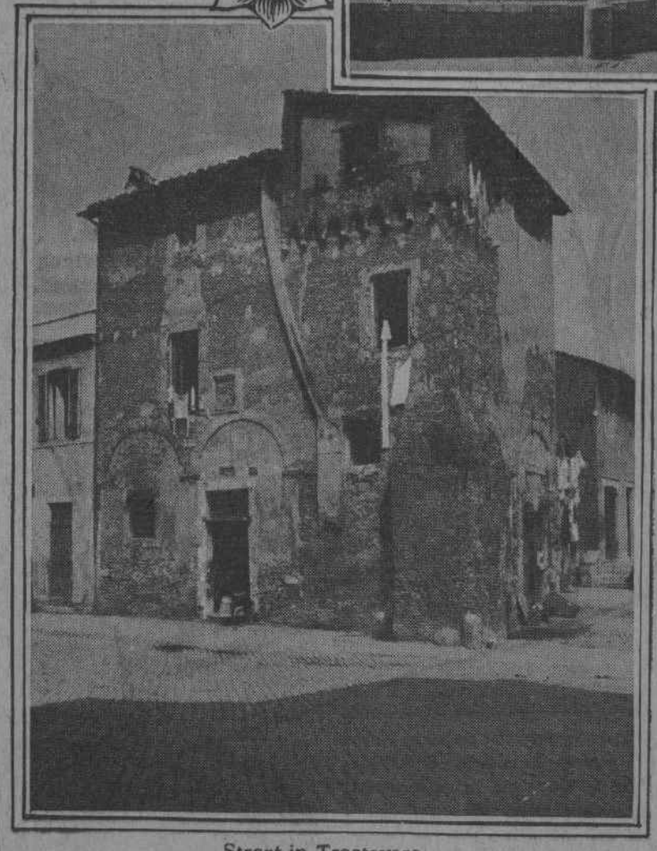
Description of a District in Which the Customs, Crimes and Traditions of Ages Remain Unchanged—Here All Italy Pays Homage to the Marvellous Beauty of Palmira Ceccani

Palmira Ceccani



House of Fornarina

Facade of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome.—Cardinal Gibbons' Titular Church



Street in Trastevere

BY WILLIAM B. FITTS.

IN Rome to-day there are two forces which centuries have not been able to destroy—St. Peter's and Trastevere—and almost side by side they have existed, struggling each in its separate way for life.

One must go back so far in history for the story of the martyrdom of St. Peter and the building of the church over his grave that if it were not that St. Peter's itself, like some human thing, has lived every hour since the time of Nero we should soon lose ourselves in a labyrinth of tiresome historical material.

Trastevere, too, has its past. In no part of Rome have customs, prejudices and codes of morals and honor lingered on unchanged as here, where we find a whole people living and influencing life in a totally different manner from their brothers and sisters just across the Tiber.

Popes, emperors and nobles fought, pillaged, conquered and lost ground in Trastevere, but life and customs have held on, and many are the spots sacred because of the good and the bad which are there.

The fact is, Trastevere contains even to-day more than remnants of the same tempestuous forces which have ruled its people for many hundreds of years.

Pass through the Piazzo Campo di Fiore, where Giordano Bruno was burned; by the Palazzo della Chancellaria, with its simple but majestic beauty; on to Palazzo Farnese, where France's Ambassador lives, and by his garden at the back overhanging the Tiber. Then, turning to the left on the Via Giulia, we come to the Ponte Sisto, crossing which we are in Trastevere.

Republican Rome.

Immediately we find ourselves in another world, where old customs are evidently dying hard. The hand of Time has been unable to alter so quickly as our present civilization demands.

In Trastevere we are in republican Rome, where politics is a living thing and conscience and honor—of their kind—do not slumber. There are few churches here, and these are tucked away for the most part in lost corners, and the Roman priest is rare. The women sometimes seek comfort within its sacred walls, but the men guide their lives as best they may, independent and fearless. The streets are narrow and overflowing with human life. Hand carts and old fashioned carts from the Campagna are halted under the lee of the walls of the houses.

Suddenly coming out from the Via de Moro, the street of the Moors, we find the Church of Sante Maria in Trastevere, with its mosaic over the portal, dating back to the twelfth century. Everywhere, for it is Sunday, are the much loved Bersaglieri, whose barracks are near by, in an open spot not far from the banks of the Tiber. As one twists and turns in and out of streets and lines life and movement are everywhere incessant, and here generation after generation of these men and women have lived whose forefathers, many of them, must have helped to make Roman history.

What took me to this spot was not so much its history as the desire to pass some hours among a people whose criminality is so well known and yet which differs entirely from what is found elsewhere, and whose people under the influence of Italy's war with Turkey have forgotten their personal quarrels and allowed their feuds of generations to sleep. Hitherto hardly a day went by that Roman newspapers did not chronicle one or more Trasteverine crimes, and yet now, since the war began, some new spirit has entered the soul of this passionate people and crime does not exist there.

All philosophers have had something to tell us about the good and bad influences of war, but just here we have a book of life in which there are living characters, passionate men and women who under the influence of war have changed characteristically so as to become unrecognizable.

Their Favorite Game.

The fact is, as I have said, at the present time there is no crime in Trastevere, and even the favorite game of bagnatelli is almost forgotten. Pagnatelli, in Trastevere, has its origin in a distant past, when over the wine chance would bring together men with hatred for each other in their hearts. Imagine a dozen fearless men in these days meeting at night in one of the many sombre taverns of Trastevere. Three or four litres of wine are called for and the decanters and glasses placed upon the table. One of the company throws out his hands, upon which may be seen three, four or more extended fingers, the others being held back clinched in the palm. Soon every man's hands are above the table with a certain number of fingers extended, which are quickly counted.

Let us say there are eighteen fingers in all in evidence, and so the eighteenth man, counting from right to left and beginning with the one who first threw out his hands, becomes by chance the master of ceremonies. It is he who now dominates and directs the festivities, inviting first one and then another to drink with him.

Suddenly it is discovered that the decanters are empty, and yet there is one man who has not been invited by the master to drink, and his glass has remained empty. For a moment there is complete silence, for every man there knows that purposely the master has insulted this companion by not sharing wine with him, and in this way throwing defiance in his face. Quickly the hands of the two enemies steal to their pockets and blades of long steel knives flash out. If the tavern is in some remote corner of Trastevere the fight begins at once where the men stand. If not, they go outside and find some quiet spot where death is bound to come to one or the other.

And there are laws governing the duel with the knife, which also have been handed down from generations past, and they are adhered to, and the fight for human life is carried on as fairly as the polite duel between men of another school in Italy and France.

It is this phase of life which marks the Trasteverine and makes him a Roman quite distinct from the rest of his race. In his blood lurk the elements of many black, and some pure, deeds in Roman history, and his pride in all that is elementary and racial dominates him completely.

Touch the woman belonging to a Trasteverine or look upon her too boldly and the chances are that it will cost you your life. It is not in Trastevere that Don Juan seeks his prey, nor will the common criminal find here his accomplices for the ordinary crimes known to the police. The criminality of Trastevere is difficult to define, because it is so different from that which finds its way into the police courts of the generality of cities.

Crime in Trastevere.

There is something almost subliminal, something beyond human laws and understanding in Trastevere crime. It not only has its code of honor, but that code was made for men of perfectly fearless temperaments, in which neither priest nor teacher can play any part, for each man is a law unto himself.

Even the Roman jurist finds himself perplexed by the psychological aspect of the matter and the jury is bound to be influenced by the traditional element, over which the members evidently have not much control. Theft or desire for money are not incentives, and games of chance are for the most part played for wine. However, one must be cautious if one places a value upon one's life, for every game of chance, important or not, may lead to the duel with knives—and death.

Crimes growing out of love prevail in Trastevere, and somehow it is not to be wondered at, for the type of beauty of its women must influence strangely the race of men we find here and drive them to fight for possession. Entering one of the large modern buildings for working people, I asked a group of old women and children in the court if the Queen of Rome lived there, and with pride they all pointed to the iron stairway and explained how I was to find the most beautiful girl in Rome, who in September last was chosen and crowned its first queen.

Going into a well lighted, clean little apartment whose windows look out on the Janiculum, I found a woman ironing. A girl, her daughter, sitting at the table idly dreaming, was the most beautiful creature I had seen in this old Roman quarter. Dressed in a clinging mauve gown with narrow strips of black velvet on its edges, Palmira Ceccani languidly rose to greet me. As I took her hand and looked into her dark blue eyes and the faint blush of surprise at suddenly seeing a stranger came to her cheeks I knew better why the young men of Trastevere fought and killed each other. Much has been written about this girl, who was chosen from all Rome as its purest type of beauty. Perhaps I was surprised at the oval face and the rich fulness of the lips. The Roman severity of beauty, with its haughtiness and classic form, was replaced by soft and mellow features.

All Italy has bowed to this favored mortal, and many have struggled to express her beauty in words only, for she will not sit as a model to any of the many artists who implore her. The Prime Minister, Signor Giolitti, sent her a clock and vases. There were a diadem from the newspaper Messagero and 5,000 lire from the Associated Press. And there poured in upon this queen at the time of her coronation rings, bracelets, jewels, hats, dresses and every conceivable thing from shopkeepers of all quarters of Rome.

Historic Trastevere.

As her brother showed me letters and telegrams expressing good wishes for his sister, who had been born and raised not a stone's throw from where another woman of Trastevere had lived in former days, who so often kept Raphael from obeying the Pope, his master, and fired him with his absorbing passion for love and beauty, I knew how hopeless it was to try even to compare the present with the past. One fears that the eager desire to buy and to sell so completely possesses us all that the kind of love which had such power over one of the world's greatest painters and which made the Fornarina famous is not possible in this twentieth century.

And, too, the Popes, the Medicis and the Chigis, who understood the value of the eternal blessings of beauty to mankind, are no more. There did live a Bavarian king not long ago who somehow understood the value of a great gift, but the world thought him mad.

The history of Trastevere is filled with stories of the life and death of members of most of the great and noble Roman families. Few of the palaces are left where some of the strangest deeds known to man were committed. It was here the Anguillara family fought the Orsini so long and madly, the four fearless Mattei brothers killed and were killed in turn.

Raphael walked here, and loved, and was adored by Margaret the Fornarina. Close by was St. Onofrio, where the last days of Tasso's unhappy and discordant life were passed. Across the river Beatrici Cenci plotted her father's death for violating a holy vow. Christina, Queen of Sweden, lived here and occupied her time in strange ways, loving men and intrigue, and, in her later years, poetry and art. To her was given a Pope's love, and kings and kings' ambassadors came to her, as well as all the nobles of Rome. Opposite the Fornarina stands the Palazzo Corsini, in which every possible crime known to mankind was committed.

From the time when Trastevere sprang into life until the present day fearless independence of thought and life has governed its people, whose descendants have now gone to fight the Turks on the African coast, and Trasteverine women hold their breath, thinking of their sons and lovers. Perhaps it is out of pity that the men have forgotten their quarrels and old time feuds, thinking only of the glory of their sons upon the battlefield.

There is a certain dignity about this race of people, whose pride lies in the fact that they are true Romans and, like their forefathers, fear nothing. Their criminality is strange and seems to be almost accidental. Every inch of ground in Trastevere has been bespattered with the blood of victims of their own passions, but through all the ages there have been curious laws of honor guiding life and death.

The Trastevere quarter of Rome still lives, bordering on the Borgo, in which lies St. Peter's. Is it not a somewhat curious law of life which has permitted these two forces to live side by side for all these many centuries?

Concerning Anti-Typhoid Fever Inoculation.

[From the European Edition of the Herald]

THE comparative frequency of typhoid fever renders it necessary to seek some means of reducing the extension of this disease. As there is only a small proportion (about one per cent) of second attacks of typhoid fever, it may be assumed that an attack, even an attenuated one, assures an efficacious preservation, and people may therefore hope for a favorable result from a process of immunization based on an analogous principle.

To procure immunization in a general way, either the system should be inoculated by means of active microbes, attenuated or dead, constituting "active" immunization, or a serum derived from some immune animal should be injected in order to place the organism in a state of defence, this constituting "passive" immunization. The former is lasting, the second is transient and hence less desirable. For this reason bacteriologists have had recourse for preference to "active" vaccination—that is to say, they have used inoculations either of the typhoid bacillus or of extracts or "autosats" of this bacillus.

From numerous researches made in many countries it results that:—

(1) Anti-typhoid inoculation confers a high degree of immunity against typhoid infection by reason of the power imputed to it "of reducing by at least one-half the number of cases of typhoid fever" in the instances where this mode of immunization has been tried.

(2) Under similar conditions of infection typhoid fever determines a general mortality four times less among those who have been inoculated.

(3) The typhoid fever is less severe and results in a mortality among the inoculated one-half that in other conditions.

As the conclusion of the interesting discussions which recently took place on this subject in the Paris Academy of Medicine that body was of opinion that "the optional use of anti-typhoid inoculation might be recommended as a rational and practical means of diminishing in marked proportions the frequency and gravity of typhoid fever in France and her colonies; that this recommendation is applicable to all those whose profession, usual or accidental conditions of dietary or residence, whose daily and frequent relations with patients or 'carriers' of germs expose them to direct or indirect contagion by the bacillus of typhoid fever."

Putting into practice the resolution so definitely expressed by the Academy of Medicine as its indorsement of the report so conscientiously and scientifically established which he had presented to that body, Professor Vincent, of the Val-de-Grace Hospital, in August last proceeded to Morocco, where, in the northern region of the borders of Algeria and Morocco, he practised inoculation in the cases of 283 soldiers—rather more than one man in ten of the total force.

Although these inoculations were made in the month of August on men who were fatigued and weakened by the terrific heat in a region already seriously infected by typhoid fever, none of the men suffered any inconvenience. On the contrary, three men who were already in the incubation stage of typhoid fever at the moment when they were inoculated, or who were infected during the course of the immunization process, suffered from only a very mild form of the fever.

The exceptionally unfavorable conditions in which the troops were then placed, says Dr. Vincent, owing to the absence of local resources, the bad quality of the water, the extraordinary abundance of flies infected with germs, and finally the epidemic which prevailed in the region, had also no effect in reducing the efficacy of the inoculations. In order to assure rigorously exact results care was taken not to inoculate any man who had previously had typhoid fever or even a slight attack of gastric fever. Moreover, the Arab troops, with the exception of one native officer, were not inoculated.

The inoculated and the non-inoculated mingled indifferently, participating in the same fatigues, the same service and the same manifold causes of infection.

Out of 283 soldiers inoculated 129 were treated with Wright's preparation, a culture of typhoid bacilli in peptonized broth, and 154 were treated with Dr. Vincent's preparation, made with different species of typhoid bacilli.

Under these conditions the 2,632 men of the European force who were not inoculated against typhoid fever and not immune owing to a prior attack of typhoid, had, during the months of August, September and October, 171 cases of typhoid fever and 134 cases of slight gastric fever. The number of deaths was 22. The proportion of cases of typhoid fever and slight gastric fever among the non-inoculated was 115.88 to 1,000 men.

The 129 men inoculated with Wright's preparation had a single case of slight typhoid fever, or a proportion of 7.75 in 1,000. The 154 men treated by means of Dr. Vincent's preparation had no case of typhoid fever, no case of suspected gastric fever and no deaths.

The soldiers who were inoculated and who did not become infected during the process of immunization were thus enabled to go through a violent epidemic without being attacked by the disease which struck down an enormous proportion of the non-inoculated. These results are all the more convincing and all the more important, says Dr. Vincent, because everything which could attenuate or annihilate the effects of the inoculation and all the most serious causes liable to produce an intense predisposition to typhoid infection were found combined in this instance.

Accordingly, as a consequence of these facts, numbers of men who had not been rendered immune came spontaneously and begged to be inoculated. In one camp more than a third of the soldiers requested to be treated.

The anti-typhoid inoculations made in Morocco demonstrate the perfect harmlessness of the preparations used in the treatment. They likewise prove their efficacy. This method of immunization therefore appears to be a great advance in the struggle against typhoid fever, the attacks of which are so frequent and so serious both among civilians and in the army.

Testing Him Thoroughly.

THEY tell the following story of a New York physician, now a leading member of his profession, who as an interne in a Chicago hospital years ago incidentally held his own with a crowd of rather gay friends.

One morning the interne awoke to find that he had sadly overslept. Half dazed, he put on his clothes and made his way to the hospital. The first patient was a big Irishman.

"What seems to be the trouble?" asked the sleepy doctor, as he stifled a yawn and took the patient by the hand to examine his pulse.

"It's me lungs, doc," said the man. "They're in a bad way. I can't get me breath at all."

"Your pulse is normal, but let me examine the lung action a moment," replied the doctor, kneeling beside the cot and laying his head on the Irishman's chest.

"Now talk a bit," he continued, closing his eyes and listening attentively for sounds of pulmonary congestion.

"What shall I say?"

"Oh, say anything. Count one, two, three, and so on, that way," murmured the interne drowsily.

"Wan, two, three, four, five, six," began the patient.

When the young doctor with a start opened his eyes the Celt was continuing huskily, "Tin hundred and sixty-nine, tin hundred and sivinty, tin hundred and sivinty-wan."